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RESULTS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S CONSIDERATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS TASK FORCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

Report of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements to the Secretary-General

Note by the secretariat

The secretariat has the honour to circulate, in the annex to the present note, the report of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements, dated 15 June 1998, as submitted to the Secretary-General on 18 June 1998.

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Annex

UN TASK FORCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

REPORT TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

June 15, 1998

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE REASON FOR THIS REPORT

1. The Secretary-General, in his report "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform" (A/51/950 of 14 July 1997), recognized the need for a more integrated, systemic approach to policies and programmes throughout the whole range of UN activities in the economic, social, and development fields. As part of this effort, he informed the General Assembly that he would, in consultation with Governments and the heads of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Centre on Human Settlements (Habitat), develop new measures for strengthening and restructuring those two organizations, based on General Assembly Resolutions 2997 (XXVII) and 32/162 and taking into account decisions and recommendations of the Governing Council of UNEP and the Commission on Human Settlements. He committed himself to make recommendations to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session in September 1998.

2. To assist him in this respect, in 1998 the Secretary-General constituted a Task Force composed of high-level advisors from governments, civil society, and within the United Nations. The membership of the Task Force is listed in Annex A and its Terms of Reference in Annex B.

3. The Task Force met four times: 1 April 1998 in New Delhi; 26-27 April in New York; 29-30 May in Bonn; and 13-15 June in Geneva.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4. The first major intergovernmental conference on the environment was the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in June 1972. That Conference adopted a farsighted Declaration and Programme of Action and led to the creation of UNEP by the General Assembly with a mandate to catalyze and coordinate environmental actions within the UN system. The General Assembly decided that UNEP's headquarters should be located in Nairobi, Kenya. The UNEP Governing Council became the world's primary environmental forum. The two decades following the Stockholm Conference saw many international actions to protect the environment, including the negotiation of many global and regional conventions.

5. The Stockholm Conference recognized that the built environment deserved special attention and recommended the holding of a further United Nations Conference on this subject. Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements was held in Vancouver, Canada, from 31 May to 11 June 1976. One of the perceptions that emerged in Vancouver and has been reinforced since then is that human settlements are an integral element of development and should be a high priority at the national level.

6. The Vancouver Conference decided on the Vancouver Declaration and Action Plan, which made national Governments and the international community aware of the plight of human settlements worldwide. It also led to the creation of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (commonly known as Habitat), which was established in 1978. In view of the substantial overlap between environmental and human settlements issues, Habitat was located in Nairobi alongside UNEP. Existing UN activities and programmes, including the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning established in the mid-1960s and the UN Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation established by UNEP, were integrated into Habitat. Habitat was to service a new intergovernmental body, the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements, and carry out an integrated work programme including research, policy guidance, training, technical cooperation, and information. Mechanisms were put in place to encourage cooperation between UNEP and Habitat.

7. Twenty years after Stockholm, the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. UNCED drew even more popular participation and media coverage than the Stockholm Conference, including greater participation by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other major groups of society from developing countries. Unlike the Stockholm Conference, UNCED was attended by scores of heads of Government. UNCED approved the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 (a compendium of actions needed to achieve sustainable development), and the non-legally binding Forest Principles. It also witnessed the signature of major conventions on climate change and biological diversity.

8. A second Habitat Conference (Habitat II) was held in Istanbul, Turkey, in June 1996. It adopted the Istanbul Declaration, in which the nations present endorsed "the universal goals of ensuring adequate shelter for all and making human settlements safer, healthier and more liveable, equitable, sustainable and productive." The Habitat Agenda that was agreed on at Habitat II is the Global Plan of Action to improve human settlements conditions for the next

twenty years. Habitat is charged with coordinating its implementation among UN agencies and facilitating its application by Governments, as well as among other major groups of society.

9. From the time of the Stockholm Conference, it was recognized that environmental issues could not be treated as afterthoughts or dealt with solely by "end-of-the-pipe" approaches, but that environmental considerations must be integrated into the activities of sectoral and development-oriented institutions. Many changes of this kind occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, and the pace of change has accelerated since UNCED and Habitat II. As a result, the international agenda for environment and development has been transformed, and the context in which the United Nations must operate has changed radically. The changes within the UN system have been conceptual and organizational; meanwhile the context has been altered by the emergence or continuation of sweeping global trends.

10. The concept of *sustainable development* links economic, social, and environmental concerns, and has been adopted by the world community. Agenda 21 assigns a broad range of responsibilities for action to UN organizations and bodies, national Governments, and many other international and national groups. Environmental issues have appeared increasingly on the agendas of development-oriented institutions including UNDP, the World Bank, the regional multilateral development banks, and such specialized agencies as WHO, WMO, FAO, UNESCO, and UNIDO, and the UN Regional Economic Commissions. The "greening" of these bodies has been a necessary and welcome step, but the integration of environmental considerations in their programmes clearly needs to go further. There also has been a welcome recognition of the need to move in these directions among some sections of business and industry.

11. The *UN structure* was altered after UNCED by the creation of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which provides a high-level forum for environmental, developmental, social, and economic issues. The Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), a standing committee of the UN's Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), has brought together the UN bodies concerned with these issues and has helped to coordinate their work. The IACSD's system of designating agencies to be "Task Managers" for specific issue areas has decentralized the responsibility for developing coordinated policy positions in key areas of sustainable

development, especially as inputs to the CSD. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has been established as a mechanism for financing activities to deal with some global environmental problems.

12. The establishment of the CSD, IACSD and the GEF, has created additional institutional arrangements alongside UNEP in the field of environment and sustainable development, and has highlighted the need to review the role of UNEP and the UNEP Governing Council in this context. The number of international legal instruments concerned with the environment has continued to grow. Demands on Ministers and Governments have increased because of the multiplication of high-level meetings, including those of the Conferences of Parties to international conventions. At the same time the financial resources available to support international and national actions for sustainable development have fallen far short of what is required, and UNEP's own Environment Fund has declined substantially.

13. Whereas there were institutional changes in the UN structure in the field of environment following UNCED, there were no such institutional developments in the field of human settlements following Habitat II. Rather, the Commission on Human Settlements was assigned a central role in monitoring, within the United Nations system, the implementation of the Habitat Agenda; acting a as catalyst to promote adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development; advising ECOSOC on human settlements issues; and assisting ECOSOC in coordinating the implementation of the Habitat Agenda within the United Nations system. Unfortunately, the situation deteriorated and Habitat lacked the capacity to carry out these tasks. The absence of any significant institutional change subsequent to the Habitat II Conference has hampered the effective implementation and follow-up of the outcome of that Conference.

14. Human demands on the global life support system continue to mount as poverty and affluence spread in parallel through the globe. Despite all the efforts made since the Stockholm Conference, the environment continues to deteriorate in many parts of the world. Some social, economic, and technological trends are exacerbating these problems. In addition, rapid urbanization is outstripping the provision of the services needed for health and welfare. New and unexpected problems will certainly continue to arise. Much more vigorous and effective coordinated action will then be required at all levels. Better monitoring and assessment, and enhanced means of providing effective information to Governments will also be crucial.

15. International action will continue to be essential in meeting these challenges. The UN system must play a central part in this action, in cooperation with other components of society. Agenda 21 and the Istanbul Plan of Action broke new ground by addressing a broad spectrum of "stakeholders" who should be involved in the process of developing and implementing policies and actions for environment and human settlements.

III. NEEDS AND RESPONSES

16. These developments, trends, and challenges will influence and to a great extent define the role of the United Nations in the field of environment and human settlements. The ways of the past will not suffice in this new era. The Task Force has concluded that the UN and its governmental and non-governmental partners will need reformed structures and new methods in order to optimize their effectiveness.

17. The main roles of the United Nations in the field of environment and human settlements are to:

(a) Facilitate intergovernmental consensus and international cooperation on environmental components of policies and actions for sustainable development, including legally binding commitments.

(b) Promote support, especially from developed to developing countries, so as to facilitate the implementation of agreed environmental and human settlements action plans, especially Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda.

(c) Involve, encourage, and support relevant "stakeholders" so that they make their appropriate contribution at global, regional, national, and local levels.

(d) Monitor and assess existing and emerging environmental problems, alert policy makers and the world public to them, and advocate and coordinate measures and action to tackle these problems and their causes, thereby reducing future risks.

(e) Provide support and resources to enable the effective implementation of global and national commitments relating to the environment and human settlements, and to build capacity for environmental action in developing countries.

18. The remaining sections of this Report consider:

(a) The linkages at the interagency level between the UN institutions concerned with environment, sustainable development, and human settlements, including environmental and environment-related conventions.

(b) Linkages among and support to environmental and environment-related conventions.

(c) The internal needs of the UN system, especially those of UNEP and Habitat in Nairobi.

(d) The UN's role (the Earthwatch function) in collecting, evaluating, and disseminating environmental data and information, including the UN's responsibility for early and emergency response in the field of environment and human settlements.

(e) The intergovernmental structure of the United Nations in the field of environment and human settlements.

(f) The involvement of civil society and of profit-making enterprises.

(g) The possible role of a reconstituted UN Trusteeship Council.

A. Interagency linkages

19. The Task Force considers that the UN system needs a strong and respected UNEP as its leading environmental organization. For this purpose, UNEP needs to be given adequate financial, staff, and information capacities. In particular, it should be the recognized centre of a network of information, monitoring, assessment, and early warning, and should play to the full its role as an implementing agency of the GEF.

20. The Task Force's review of existing UN structures and arrangements in the field of environment and human settlements, linked to different issues and including in-depth examination of the energy and water sectors, has revealed that current UN activities are characterized by substantial overlaps, unrecognized linkages, and gaps. These flaws are basic and pervasive. They prevent the UN system from using its scarce resources to best advantage in addressing problems that are crucial to the human future; harm the credibility and weight of the United Nations in the environmental arena; and damage the UN's working relationship with its partners in and outside of Government.

21. Needed is a problem-solving, results-oriented approach that enables UN bodies and their partners to share information about their respective plans and activities; to inform and consult one another about proposed new initiatives; to contribute to a planning framework that permits the plans and activities of each participant to be reviewed within the framework of the whole range of activities being carried on by all participants; and to consult with each other with a view to developing an agreed set of priorities and on the measures through which each participating organization can best contribute to those priorities and achieve a more rational and cost-effective use of their respective capacities and resources.

22. These needs were recognized by the Secretary-General in paragraphs 248-250 of his 1997 report on reforming the United Nations, under the heading "issue management system."

Recommendation 1:

The Task Force recommends that in order to meet these needs with respect to the environment and human settlements, the Secretary-General should establish an Environmental Management Group (EMG). It would replace the existing Inter-Agency Environment Coordination Group, which should be abolished.

23. The EMG would be chaired by the Executive Director of UNEP, supported by a secretariat. The Chair would report to the Secretary-General. The EMG would include as core members the main UN entities concerned with environment and human settlements. Particular meetings would involve additional UN entities, financial institutions, and organizations outside the UN system which have experience and expertise relevant to the issues on the agenda.

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24. The EMG would be concerned with environment and human settlement issues in the context of the linkages between environment and development as defined at UNCED and subsequently elaborated. Habitat should be a prominent participant in the EMG, which should structure its operations so as to achieve an integrated UN work programme that bridges the gaps that have existed between the two areas.

25. The most important goal of the EMG should be to achieve effective coordination and joint action in key areas of environmental and human settlements concern. Another important objective should be to assist intergovernmental bodies in the area of environment and human settlements, in particular the UNEP GC and the Commission on Human Settlements, in the preparation of coordinated inputs to intergovernmental fora, notably the CSD. The EMG should report on an informational basis to the ACC, and should bring an environmental perspective into the work of the IACSD. The EMG should establish time-bound task forces or working groups covering clusters of issues in which representatives of the main institutions involved in a particular issue can work together quickly to solve important problems (for example, the recently reconstituted Ecosystem Conservation Group).

26. The EMG should include convention secretariats among its participants when needed. In addition to facilitating the kinds of linkages among conventions that are recommended in the next section, the EMG should act to ensure that there are appropriate linkages among activities that occur under conventions and relevant activities elsewhere in the international system.

27. The Task Force considered the question whether the EMG should produce a single UN environmental programme, similar to the former System-Wide, Medium-Term Environment Programme. The Task Force concluded that, in view of fast-moving global trends, a static programme, no matter how frequently it is updated, is bound to lag behind real needs. Instead, the EMG should create a dynamic process for review of planned activities and modification of goals and activities in light of new knowledge. However, subgroups of the EMG may agree on sharply focussed action plans as a means of coordinating actions at the "programme" level and allocating resources in the most effective manner.

28. Regional action and regional coordination are essential in the field of environment and human settlements. At the level of field operations, the existing system of UN Resident Coordinators is responsible for effective

coordination of activities related to environment and human settlements, and should be strengthened. The EMG should from time to time review the effectiveness of this coordination.

B. Linkages among and support to environmental and environment-related conventions

29. The creation of a large number of legally binding instruments in areas of environmental concern has been a major success of the international community. However, as a result of decisions by Governments, the secretariats of environmental and environment-related conventions have been located in diverse geographic locations, with little regard to the functional relationships among conventions. That dispersal has resulted in loss of efficiency because of inability to take advantage of synergies among conventions and substantial costs through loss of economies of scale and fragmentation of administrative, conference, and infrastructure services. The period after UNCED led to a significant increase in activities related to environmental and environment-related conventions, and the number of international meetings of relevant treaty bodies has increased significantly. This has created additional burdens, especially for Ministers.

30. Bearing in mind that the main policy decisions under conventions are taken by their respective Conferences of Parties, which are autonomous bodies, strengthening of the linkages between conventions, with a view to achieving synergies and multiple benefits and promoting coherence of policies and actions, should be a long-term, strategic goal of the international community. Intergovernmental bodies, including the UN General Assembly at its 1997 Special Session (UNGASS), at paragraphs 119 and 123 of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, have identified the need for more effective linkages and support. Decisions of UNGASS and prior decisions by the General Assembly and the UNEP Governing Council have provided a clear basis for UNEP to foster such linkages. Pursuant to these mandates, UNEP has sponsored annual meetings of the secretariats of selected environmental conventions, which have addressed common issues such as implementation at the national level, including development of relevant national legislation and institutions, capacity building, and technical assistance.

31. Further steps are needed to strengthen linkages and provide support that will ensure that the international community derives maximum benefit from the investments it has made in this system of international instruments.

Recommendation 2:

The Task Force recommends that, in addition to integrating convention secretariats and convention-related issues in the work of the EMG, the following actions should be taken by UNEP in pursuance of the above-mentioned mandate from UNGASS:

(a) UNEP's substantive support to global and regional conventions should be founded on its capacities for information, monitoring, and assessment, which need to be strengthened substantially and urgently for this purpose. UNEP should build its capacity and its networks of support in order to ensure the scientific underpinning of conventions, to respond to their requests for specialized analysis and technological assessments, and to facilitate their implementation.

(b) The Executive Director of UNEP should continue to sponsor joint meetings of heads of secretariats of global and regional conventions and use this forum to recommend actions to ensure that the work programmes established by the Conferences of Parties to the conventions, together with substantive support offered by UNEP, are complementary, fill gaps and take advantage of synergy, and avoid overlap and duplication. These meetings also should explore ways of fulfilling common substantive and administrative needs. Recommendations from these meetings should be presented to the Conferences of Parties by the respective secretariats.

(c) The Governing Council of UNEP should invite its President to consult the Presidents of Conferences of Parties to selected conventions on arrangements for periodic meetings between representatives of those conventions in order to address cross-cutting issues arising from the work programmes of these bodies and policy approaches being followed by them. The Executive Director of UNEP and the heads of the respective convention secretariats would organize and participate in these meetings. The conclusions of these meetings would be brought to the attention of UNEP's Governing Council and the respective Conferences of Parties by the respective secretariats.

(d) Concerned over the operational inefficiencies and costs arising from the geographical dispersal of convention secretariats, the Task Force recommends that the Secretary-General through the Executive Director of UNEP invite Governments and Conferences of Parties to consider the implications of this trend and ways to overcome the resulting problems. Every effort should be made to co-locate new conventions with other conventions in the same functional cluster (for example, biological resources, chemicals/waste, marine pollution) and with institutions with which they have a particular affinity. With respect to existing conventions, approaches should include promoting cooperation among the secretariats within each cluster, with a view to their eventual co-location and possible fusion into a single secretariat; and, in the longer term, the negotiation of umbrella conventions covering each cluster.

C. UNEP, Habitat, and the United Nations in Nairobi

32. It was recognized at the time of the Stockholm Conference that environment and human settlements issues are closely related. In consequence, the Vancouver Conference decided to locate Habitat alongside UNEP in Nairobi. Subsequent events have strengthened this relationship, and the worldwide trend toward urbanization seems certain to forge even closer links. Yet cooperation between UNEP and Habitat is still limited.

33. The Task Force discussed the Nairobi location of the United Nations and agreed that there is an urgent need to strengthen it. Nairobi is the only location of a major UN office in the developing world (the other major offices, in addition to the UN Headquarters in New York, are the UN Offices at Geneva and Vienna). The UN Office at Nairobi (UNON) should have arrangements in keeping with its status. There are several requirements for achieving this goal, in addition to the already mentioned need for closer coordination between UNEP and Habitat. They include better communications capabilities, improved physical security, an enhanced UN presence in Nairobi, and adequate access to the Regular Budget of the United Nations with respect to administrative costs. The Task Force:

(a) Commends the Government of Kenya for the efforts already taken to improve communication between the Nairobi location and the rest of the world but urges the Executive Director to work

together with the Government to enhance and strengthen communications capabilities by allowing unrestricted access to the Mercure satellite at a reasonable cost.

(b) Is aware of the socioeconomic problems of the region and the difficulty of ensuring physical security for UN staff and related personnel, yet recognizes that lack of security makes it difficult for UNEP and Habitat to attract and retain the highly qualified staff they must have to succeed in their missions.

Recommendation 3:

The Task Force recommends that the Secretary-General, through the Director General of UNON, request the Government of Kenya to address further the problem of physical security.

(c) **Recommendation 4**:

The Task Force recommends that other UN agencies, funds, and programmes should be stimulated to establish or expand activities in Nairobi, so as to transform the UN compound in Nairobi into a fully active UN Office.

(d) Notes that UNEP and Habitat are the only UN entities with global responsibilities that have their headquarters in a developing country, reflecting the commitment of the international community to strengthen capacity in developing nations to address the issues of environment and human settlements. Currently, these organizations conduct their work under difficult financial conditions.

Recommendation 5:

The Task Force recommends that UNON, which provides common services to UNEP and Habitat, be strengthened and be provided, as an exceptional measure, with sufficient resources from the regular budget to fulfill its tasks, and that the UN Headquarters consider the possibility of relieving UNEP and Habitat from paying rent.

(e) Believes that the Secretary-General acted wisely when he designated one individual to head UNEP, Habitat, and UNON.

Recommendation 6:

The Task Force recommends that UNEP, Habitat and UNON should continue in the future to be directed by one person.

(f) Sees the measures suggested above as important ingredients in a process that would enhance confidence in UNEP and Habitat, facilitating the attainment of a broader, more stable and predictable financial basis for the two organizations.

34. There are a number of ways in which UNEP and Habitat can benefit from their co-location. Among them are common administrative functions, common support institutions, common programme activities, and the possibility of co-located regional offices.

Recommendation 7:

The Task Force recommends that the Executive Director of UNEP and Executive Director of Habitat:

(a) Utilize the United Nations Office in Nairobi (UNON) to unify the administration of the two organizations to the fullest extent feasible.

(b) Making full use of the synergistic co-location of the two organizations by establishing common institutions for:

- **Information and databases and the clearing house function;**
- **Press and information services;**
- **Library and other forms of support.**

(c) Ensure that the planning and implementation of the programmes of the two organizations are tightly linked through monitoring, assessment, and information and joint working parties on overlapping issues such as environmental

health and the sustainability of cities. This should in no way compromise the distinctive nature of UNEP and Habitat but should be complementary.

(d) Assess the possibility of co-locating the regional offices of the two organizations.

35. The Task Force is concerned that UNEP and Habitat must have adequate human and financial resources if they are to fulfill the mandates of the Nairobi Declaration and decisions of the Governing Council and the UN General Assembly. Accordingly, the Task Force agrees with and underlines the decision of the May 1998 Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council that there is an urgent need for stable and predictable funding.

Recommendation 8:

The Task Force recommends that the Executive Director of UNEP and Executive Director of Habitat develop a financial strategy, in close cooperation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives in Nairobi, and report on it to the next meetings of the Governing Council and the Commission on Human Settlements. The financial strategy should address such matters as policies concerning secondment, including geographical balance; conditions for accepting in-kind contributions; the role of counterpart contributions in implementing the programmes of UNEP and Habitat; and the possibility of obtaining funds from foundations and other private sources.

D. Information, monitoring, assessment, and early warning

36. Pursuant to the Action Plan that was adopted at the Stockholm Conference, UNEP developed during the 1970s the Earthwatch system for assessing the condition of the global environment. Chapters 38 and 40 of Agenda 21 called on UNEP to strengthen Earthwatch, "especially in the areas of urban air, freshwater, land resources (including forests and rangelands), desertification, other habitats, soil degradation, biodiversity, the high seas and the upper atmosphere," and to make the resulting information more available for decision making.

37. UNEP was named as Task Manager for Earthwatch by IACSD. The mission of Earthwatch, as agreed in 1994 by the inter-agency Earthwatch Working Party, is "to coordinate, harmonize and integrate observing,

assessment and reporting activities across the UN system in order to provide environmental and appropriate socioeconomic information for national and international decision making on sustainable development and for early warning of emerging problems requiring international actions. This should include timely information on the pressures on, status of and trends in key global resources, variables and processes in both natural and human systems and on the response to problems in these areas."

38. The Earthwatch system seeks to fulfill this mandate by integrating data and analyses from a variety of scientifically proven sources. These include, among others, the Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS), the Global Resource Information Database (GRID), and three Global Observing Systems (the Global Climate Observing System, the Global Oceans Observing System, and the Global Terrestrial Observing System). Earthwatch uses up-to-date communications technologies to maintain an excellent site on the Worldwide Web. However, the Earthwatch system and its capabilities are largely unknown to the large universe of decision makers and environmentally concerned members of the public who could benefit from it. Moreover, there are gaps and deficiencies in the underlying systems of data collection and analysis, and in the methods by which data and analysis are translated into information that is understandable to non-experts. UNEP's depleted staff in the area of monitoring and assessment lacks the ability to identify and correct these flaws.

39. Human settlement conditions are monitored and assessed by Habitat, which also collects, collates, and publishes statistics on human settlements conditions and trends. A new monitoring and assessment framework for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda will involve inputs from partners in Government and other elements of society.

40. **Recommendation 9:**

The Task Force recommends that UNEP and Habitat:

(a) Must as matter of high priority develop their capacity in the field of information monitoring and assessment in order to serve as an "environmental guardian," mobilizing the necessary resources from Governments, foundations, and international bodies.

(b) Carry out a short-term review to determine the steps needed to transform Earthwatch into an effective, accessible, well-advertised, science-based system that meets the needs of environmental and human settlements decision makers and the informed public and employs expert analysis and user feedback to correct deficiencies and update itself to meet changing needs.

(c) Take the actions, in intensive networking cooperation with national and international partner institutions, including NGOs and other major groups, that are needed to transform Earthwatch and sustain it as a fully effective system of information, monitoring, and assessment.

(d) Continue to elaborate problem-, action-, and result-oriented indicators for sustainable development in the field of environment and human settlements.

(e) Strengthen and further develop their capacity to serve as a clearing-house for collecting and disseminating information and data relevant to the condition of the environment and human settlements, including information from and to NGOs and other grassroots sources.

41. The Earthwatch system should be designed, *inter alia*, to alert the world to emerging environmental problems and threats. Information about such problems should be communicated in understandable terms to relevant decision makers, to the media, and to the informed public. Earthwatch also can contribute importantly to syntheses such as UNEP's *GEO* series and Habitat's periodic *Global Report on Human Settlements*.

42. Monitoring and assessment are closely linked to early warning of possible environmental emergencies through the prediction of extreme events or unusual environmental conditions. This kind of warning is extremely valuable for environmental and economic decision makers (for example, advance warning of drought conditions can enable farmers to plant drought-resistant crops). It may be possible to identify, on a long-term basis, potential "hot spots" or areas that are likely to be subject to rates of change that exceed the limits of sustainability and thus pose threats to regional or global security.

43. **Recommendation 10:**

The Task Force recommends that UNEP and Habitat design and maintain the system of information, monitoring, and assessment so as to maximize its ability to provide early warning of possible environmental and human settlements emergencies. It further recommends that UNEP consider establishing a capability to identify potential environmental and environment-related conflicts and provide information and analysis to guide the development of preventive measures, for example by the negotiation of joint actions.

E. Intergovernmental fora

44. The United Nations is an intergovernmental organization. Organs and agencies of the United Nations can perform their functions efficiently only if they receive clear guidance from Member States. This is true in the field of environment and human settlements, as in all others. There is a need for intergovernmental fora to give that guidance.

45. There is a lack of coherent guidance at this level. Specialized agencies, for example, are responsible only to their governing bodies. In the environmental field, some specialized agencies have sectoral missions that correspond to specific elements within national Governments; hence, the agendas of those agencies may reflect very different priorities.

46. The only entities that can give consistent guidance to these different bodies are national Governments. In view of the important role that is played in the field of environment and human settlements by international institutions not under the authority of the Secretary-General, coordination cannot be fully effective unless Governments themselves give coordinated guidance. In short, coordination at the international level should begin at home.

Recommendation 11:

The Task Force recommends that Governments make additional efforts to achieve consistency of national positions in different intergovernmental fora. The EMG should assist Governments in achieving such coherence by providing coordinated overviews of activities, plans, and policy approaches in the UN system as a whole.

47. **Recommendation 12:**

The Task Force recommends that UNEP Regional Offices should assist Governments in each region in their discussion of the global agenda, in defining priorities reflecting the particular needs of each region, and in promoting those regional priorities in the global agenda. In the implementation of regional priorities, UNEP should involve specialized agencies and other institutions concerned with environment and human settlements, as well as those that can provide financing.

48. Current intergovernmental fora are inadequate to give the kind of guidance that is needed in the environmental field. Those fora, consisting primarily of the UNEP Governing Council, the CSD, and meetings of the Conferences of Parties of leading conventions, are scattered as to time and place. They are attended by different constellations of ministers. They differ in their outcomes: some are decision making bodies, whereas others serve primarily as fora for policy debates, consensus-building, review of UN activities and plans, and exchanges with major groups. Ministers have expressed dissatisfaction because attendance at so many meetings is time-consuming for them. Moreover, the scattering of different meetings on different subjects makes it hard for participants to get the "big picture" perspective that is important for setting global priorities.

49. In addition, the traditional UN format for intergovernmental meetings does not fully meet the need for high-level consideration of environmental issues. The traditional UN format has featured formal discussion leading to agreement on the exact wording of a text. That format is ill-suited to many of the purposes which intergovernmental meetings on environment and human settlements should fulfill. Those purposes require a format that allows for actual debate and fewer statements, more in-depth discussions, more interaction with major groups, and structured efforts to produce innovative strategies that can meet tomorrow's challenges.

50. The Task Force affirms that the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Governing Council of UNEP have necessary and distinctive roles. The CSD provides a forum for high-level debate, including ministerial debate, that bridges and relates environmental, developmental, and socioeconomic elements. The UNEP Governing Council is and should remain

the primary forum within which Ministers and senior officials of Governments can review the environmental performance of the UN system as a whole and define priorities for new action.

51. **Recommendation 13:**

The Task Force recommends:

(a) That there should be an annual, ministerial-level, global environmental forum where environment ministers can gather to review and revise the environmental agenda of the United Nations in the context of sustainable development; oversee and evaluate the implementation of that agenda; discuss key issues in depth; identify challenges requiring international environmental cooperation and develop plans of action for meeting them; review the role of UNEP in relation to the GEF; and engage in a variety of discussions with their peers, with representatives of international institutions, and with major groups. In the years when it meets, the UNEP Governing Council should be that intergovernmental forum. In alternate years, the forum should be a special session of the Governing Council which would focus on issues of high priority. The venue of these special sessions should move from region to region, and regional issues should feature prominently on their agenda.

(b) That the agenda of each session of the Governing Council should be lively, designed to foster debates on topical issues and to attract media attention. Each session should cover topics of global importance and, in the case of meetings held in the regions, issues of special significance to the region where the meeting is held. Each session should be structured so as to provide input to that year's CSD meetings. A major item on the agenda of each session should be to review, from a cross-cutting perspective, the progress under the various environmental conventions.

(c) That the membership of the UNEP Governing Council should be made universal. This recommendation would not apply for the Commission on Human Settlements because it is a subsidiary body of ECOSOC.

52. The Regular and Special Sessions of the Governing Council should receive reports from the Executive Director of UNEP on the work of the Environmental Management Group in promoting linkages among components of the UN system. The joint meetings of representatives of the Conferences of Parties of selected conventions that was recommended previously might be held "back to back" with sessions of the Governing Council.

53. There is a need for stronger links between environmental and human settlements at the intergovernmental as well as the interagency level. It would not be appropriate to merge the UNEP Governing Council with the UN Commission on Human Settlements, because those bodies have distinctive characters and partially different substantive agendas, and because they typically involve two distinct sets of ministers, those responsible for the environment and those responsible for housing, and it is unlikely that many Governments would send two ministers to the same meeting. However, the agendas of the two bodies should be cross-linked and designed to complement one another. Environmental matters should be standing items on the agenda of the Commission on Human Settlements and human settlements-related issues should occupy a similar place on the agenda of the Governing Council. To the extent feasible, the Nairobi meetings of the two bodies should overlap.

54. **Recommendation 14:**

The Task Force recommends that continuing international liaison on matters relating to the programme, budget, and operations of UNEP and Habitat be undertaken in Nairobi by the Committees of Permanent Representatives and High-Level Officials convened by the Executive Director on behalf of their Chairmen. In light of the changes recommended in this report, the Governing Council of UNEP should consider the future role of the High-Level Committee of Ministers and Officials.

55. The special identity and distinctive character of Habitat should be retained, bearing in mind its mandate in UN General Assembly Resolution 32/162, as clarified and developed in the Habitat Agenda. A particularly important consideration for the Task Force is that Habitat has been designated as a focal point for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and that the Commission on Human Settlements has a central role in monitoring its implementation.

56. Habitat has a large, demand-driven technical cooperation programme with a clear development agenda. The financial support for that programme comes solely from earmarked sources. The financial basis of Habitat has been seriously eroded in recent years, particularly in regard to core funds, which are crucial for its normative activities. If Habitat is to fulfill its role in promoting the implementation of Habitat Agenda, it is imperative that its normative functions be strengthened substantially. This will require a stronger financial base, especially with regard to core funding. In addition, existing overlaps between the technical cooperation programmes and the activities of other parts of Habitat should be eliminated.

57. **Recommendation 15:**

(a) That the Executive Director of Habitat consider ways of building capacity to facilitate the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, particularly by strengthening the normative core activities of Habitat and developing it into a centre of excellence for urban development, and obtain the necessary financial resources.

(b) That the Commission on Human Settlements devote particular attention to its role in monitoring the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and take steps to prepare for the five-year review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which will occur in 2001.

58. The Task Force attaches the greatest significance to the effective use of GEF resources.

Recommendation 16:

The Task Force recommends that, consistent with the GEF Instrument, UNEP's role in providing environmental advocacy, analysis and advice in shaping GEF priorities and programmes should be strengthened, building on UNEP's current responsibility for ensuring the scientific underpinning of GEF activities. UNEP should act as catalyst and advocate for new directions and should take the lead among the three GEF implementing agencies in providing environmental advice. This role is consistent with UNEP's status as the lead agency in the UN system for identifying large-scale environmental threats and proposing remedial measures.

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Recommendation 17:

The Task Force recommends that there be increased collaboration among the three GEF implementing agencies, in accordance with relevant GEF decisions.

F. Involvement of major groups

59. Global trends imply a growing role for elements outside Government in actions and decisions affecting the environment and human settlements, including activities and decisions of the UN system. Agenda 21 recognized this reality in its description in Chapters 24-32 of the roles of "major groups," including women, youth, indigenous people, NGOs, local authorities, trade unions, business and industry, the scientific and technological community, and farmers. Governments and international bodies need the wisdom, experience, knowledge, and resources of these groups if they are going to make environmental and human settlements decisions, in the context of sustainable development, that are scientifically based, economically sound, suited to local conditions, and in accord with the desires of ordinary people.

60. The Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment and the accompanying NGO Forum marked a breakthrough in the way major groups related to and sought to influence an intergovernmental decision making process. UNCED was another watershed event, attended by representatives of some 8000 NGOs from more than 160 countries. The Habitat II Conference in 1996 was attended by some 20,000 people and representatives of more than 500 local authorities. It featured innovative mechanisms for involving major groups from the beginning of the preparatory process:

- All Governments were invited to create National Habitat II Committees involving a wide spectrum of society.

- The Drafting Group that prepared the Habitat Agenda included representatives of local authorities and NGOs.

- The Conference itself featured a "partners' Committee" (Committee II) where representatives of civil society were officially invited to assemble in their own forum and present their views to the representatives of Governments.

- UN officials joined with representatives of civil society in making possible a set of "Dialogues for the 21st Century," which explored in depth key issues concerning the future of cities, including water and energy.

- Statements produced in the dialogue sessions, together with the Chairperson's summaries of the discussions in Committee II, were included in the official record of Habitat II.

61. The CSD also has been a leader in its relations with major groups. CSD meetings are attended by representatives of a wide variety of interests. NGO participation is facilitated by a broad-based NGO Steering Committee. New participants are welcomed, and the CSD Secretariat prepares guidelines on a regular basis to help them participate and contribute. The practice at CSD meetings has been that representatives of major groups are allowed to speak virtually on an equal basis with representatives of Governments. CSD 6 in 1998 featured an innovative Industry Segment that included participants from various major groups. Additional "economic sector" segments are planned for future CSD meetings.

62. The extensive involvement of major groups at Habitat II and in the CSD has enlivened and enriched deliberations that are important to the world's future. Further steps are needed to ensure that this kind of involvement is the rule in the United Nations. They should begin with the Commission on Human Settlements and the UNEP Governing Council.

Recommendation 18:

The Task Force recommends:

(a) That the Commission on Human Settlements should consider establishing a special status for representatives of local authorities.

(b) That future sessions of the UNEP Governing Council and of the Commission on Human Settlements should be preceded by or overlap with substantial, structured meetings of major groups, covering the same substantive agenda topics that are to be covered at the intergovernmental meetings. Representatives of the major groups should be given an opportunity to discuss the findings of these meetings in a

round table meeting with ministers and should report this to the Governing Council and the Commission, which should record their responses.

(c) The practices of the Governing Council and the Commission on Human Settlements should be reformed, as an initial step, to come up to the standard of the CSD with respect to the involvement of major groups, and the Governing Council and Commission Secretariats should take steps (for example, the preparation of guidelines) to facilitate their participation. All other UN agencies involved with environment and human settlements should re-examine their rules and practices with the aim of encouraging and facilitating participation by major groups to the fullest extent practicable, consistent with the principle that the final decisions must rest with representatives of Governments. The Task Force further recommends that the Secretary-General issue general guidelines on these matters, and urges all UN agencies to conform with them.

63. It is apparent, in view of global trends and the need for cleaner methods of production, that environment and human settlements policy must be more integrated with economic decision making. This means that there must be a well balanced and effective continuing dialogue with business, industry, and other economic interests.

Recommendation 19:

The Task Force recommends that UNEP and Habitat examine, together with representatives of business, industry, and other economic interests, ways of involving that community constructively in their deliberations.

64. NGOs commonly must obtain consultative status with ECOSOC in order to gain access to intergovernmental meetings and other UN processes. Consultative status is not often denied; however, it currently takes about a year to obtain accreditation.

Recommendation 20:

The Task Force recommends that the ECOSOC accreditation process, and those of other UN entities concerned with environment and human settlements, be speeded up to the fullest extent possible.

65. NGOs from developing countries commonly have fewer resources and less capacity than those from industrialized nations. UNEP and Habitat should take actions to help them build their capacity for constructive participation.

Recommendation 21:

The Task Force recommends:

(a) That UNEP, Habitat, and UNDP systematically identify, in consultation with NGOs and NGO leaders, the needs of southern NGOs for capacity building, and act to meet those needs, both directly and by mobilizing funds from other donors. In so doing, they should keep in mind the importance of networking among NGOs, especially via electronic communications, and should help southern NGOs build their capacity in that area.

(b) That UNEP and Habitat establish a specialized unit to provide concerned NGOs with necessary and updated information and, together with UNDP, assist them technically and financially to carry out their work effectively at national, regional, and global levels. They also should establish mechanisms to ensure that the expertise and contributions of NGOs can be utilized by UNEP and Habitat.

(c) That NGOs be encouraged to strengthen their capacities to contribute effectively to the activities of UNEP and Habitat, including improving collaboration and networking among themselves and establishing focal points to liaise with UNEP and Habitat and global at regional levels.

66. Major groups from developing countries often find it difficult to attend international negotiations and meetings even when they have a right to do so, because of lack of funds for travel and subsistence.

Recommendation 22:

The Task Force recommends that, to the fullest extent possible, the UN agencies involved in environment and human settlements take steps to enable major groups from these countries to participate meaningfully in their activities, both through capacity building to make possible meaningful participation in negotiations and meetings and through establishment of funds to which Governments and others are encouraged to contribute.

67. **Recommendation 23:**

The Task Force recommends that UNEP and Habitat strengthen their system for receiving and responding to information from NGOs on environmental and human settlements problems, especially emerging problems. In this regard, UNEP and Habitat should encourage NGOs to provide information on new problems that might arise, for example, from the introduction of new technologies or new production activities or changes in economic or social policies.

G. The possible role of a reconstituted UN Trusteeship Council

68. In paragraphs 84-85 of his report on "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform," the Secretary-General recommended to the international community a "new concept of trusteeship" and proposed that the UN Trusteeship Council "be reconstituted as the forum through which Member States exercise their collective trusteeship for the integrity of the global environment and common areas such as the oceans, atmosphere and outer space," as well as linking the United Nations and civil society in addressing these areas of global concern. In a subsequent note to the General Assembly (A/52/849) the Secretary-General recalled this proposal and noted that it has become increasingly evident that issues relating to the integrity of the global environment and common areas have a direct bearing on the future of mankind and that those issues need to be understood and addressed in a strategic and long-term perspective. In that note, the Secretary-General suggested that the Task Force should elaborate further on his proposals.

69. In reviewing the proposals of the Secretary-General, the Task Force was cognizant of the note of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly (A/52/850) concerning a Millennium Assembly and Millennium Forum. That

note proposed that the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly be designated as the "Millennium Assembly" and include a high-level segment to be called the Millennium Summit. The Summit would be asked to provide guidance to the United Nations for meeting the challenges of the new century, including such matters as the nature and fundamental goals of the United Nations and the way it should relate to and interact with the growing number of international institutions, an increasingly robust global civil society, and ever more integrated global markets and systems of production. The Secretary-General's note also proposed that NGOs and other civil society actors organize a Millennium Forum to be held in conjunction with the Assembly.

70. In the same note to the General Assembly, the Secretary-General announced that, in order to facilitate focused discussions and concrete decisions, he would prepare a report on the theme of the Millennium Assembly, "The United Nations in the twenty-first century." The report would draw on a series of informal events involving Member States and other actors to be held in regional centres around the world; on events of a more specialized nature in the United Nations; and on the results of consultations currently taking place within the ACC.

71. The Task Force also recalled the decision of the UNEP GC at its recent fifth Special Session on the "Revitalization, reform and strengthening of the United Nations Environment Programme." In that decision the Governing Council, *inter alia*, decided to review at its next regular session the status of the ongoing reform of UNEP and to provide the Millennium Assembly with its conclusions concerning institutional arrangements within the United Nations system for dealing with the environmental challenges of the next century and the role of UNEP in that context. The Task Force believes that these conclusions will provide an important environmental perspective to the Millennium Assembly and enhance the preparatory process.

72. Recommendation 24:

The Task Force recommends:

(a) That the Executive Director of UNEP, in preparing for the next regular session of the Governing Council, undertake wide-ranging consultations concerning institutional arrangements for dealing with the environmental challenges of the next century.

(b) That these consultations include Government representatives, NGOs, and other representatives of civil society and the private sector, and culminate in a two-day environment forum to be held immediately before and in conjunction with the next session of the Governing Council. The forum should suggest to both the Governing Council and the Millennium Assembly and Forum forward-looking proposals for the protection of the global environment, including the possible future role of the Trusteeship Council.

(c) That the Commission on Human Settlements provide forward-looking perspectives on human settlements issues as part of this process. These perspectives also would contribute to the preparations for the Istanbul + 5 review of the Habitat Agenda to be undertaken in 2001.

Annex A. Membership of the Task Force

Task Force Members

Mr. Klaus TOEPFER (Chair)
Executive Director
United Nations Environment Programme

Ms. Maria Julia ALSOGARAY
Minister of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development
Argentina

Dr. Christina AMOAKO-NUAMA
Minister of Education
Ghana

Ambassador John ASHE
Ambassador/Deputy Permanent Representative
Permanent Mission of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations

Ms. Julia CARABIAS LILLO
Minister of Natural Resources and Fisheries
Mexico

Mr. Nitin DESAI
Under-Secretary-General
United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs

Ambassador Lars-Goran ENGFELDT
Permanent Representative of Sweden to UNEP and UNCHS

Ms. Guro FJELLANGER
Minister of Environment
Norway

Mr. Jean-Pierre HALBWACHS
Assistant Secretary-General/Controller
United Nations Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts

Sir Martin HOLDGATE
United Kingdom

Mr. Ashok KHOSLA
Development Alternatives
India

Mr. Martin KHOR
Director, Third World Network
Malaysia

Ambassador Tommy KOH
Ambassador-At-Large
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Singapore

Ms. Julia Marton LeFEVRE
LEAD International, Inc.
New York

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Mr. James Gustave SPETH
Administrator
United Nations Development Programme

Mr. Maurice STRONG (ex-officio)
Special Advisor to the Secretary-General

Mr. Mostafa K. TOLBA
President
International Centre for Environment and Development
Cairo

Ambassador Joseph TOMUSANGE
High Commissioner of the Republic of Uganda to India

Ambassador Makarim WIBISONO
Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations

Mr. Timothy E. WIRTH
President
United Nations Foundation

Mr. Michael ZAMMIT CUTAJAR
Executive Secretary
Climate Change Secretariat (UNFCCC)

Advisors to the Task Force

Mr. Peter Thacher

Hon. Eileen Claussen

Secretariat to the Task Force

Mr. Per Bakken

Mr. Donatus Okpala

Mr. Thomas Stoel

Mr. Donald Kaniaru

Ms. Lesly Puyol

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Annex B. Terms of reference of the Task Force

To review existing structures and arrangements through which environment and environment-related activities are carried out within the United Nations, with particular reference to those departments, Funds and Programmes which report to the Secretary-General, but taking into account also the relevant programmes and activities of the specialized agencies;

In this respect to focus particularly on the distinctive functions of policy, development of norms and standards, programme development and implementation and financing, as well as relationships amongst these functions;

To evaluate the efficacy and effectiveness of existing structures and arrangements and make recommendations for such changes and improvements as will optimize the work and effectiveness of the United Nations environmental work at the global level and of UNEP as the leading environmental organization or "authority," as well as the role of UNEP as the principal source of environmental input into the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development; and

To prepare proposals, for consideration by the Secretary-General and subsequent submission to the General Assembly, on reforming and strengthening UN activities in the environmental and human settlement areas.

Annex C. List of abbreviations

ACC	UN Administrative Committee on Coordination
CSD	UNns Commission on Sustainable Development
ECOSOC	UN Economic and Social Council
FAO	UN Food and Agricultural Organization
GA	UN General Assembly
GC	Governing Council of the UN Environment Programme
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEMS	UNEP Global Environment Monitoring System
GRID	UNEP Global Resource Information Database
Habitat	UN Centre for Human Settlements
IACSD	Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UN	United Nations
UNCED	UN Conference on Environment and Development
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
UNGASS	United Nations General Assembly Special Session
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNON	UN Office at Nairobi
WHO	World Health Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization